

Preface

What can I do?

This is a question many of us ask.

We want to make a difference. We want to clean up and protect the environment. We want to be part of the change that is so desperately needed today. We know that the air we breathe is so polluted that it is hazardous for our health. Our rivers are dying because of garbage and sewage, our forests are under threat. We know that much has to be done to safeguard our environment, because without this our planet's survival is at stake.

We know this. But the question in our mind is what can we do? Is there anything we can do, as individuals or as collectives belonging to schools, colleges or even residential complexes and colonies? Can we contribute? How?

We can. Many years ago Mahatma Gandhi had said that we need to be the change we want to see in the world. This is what we need to do in today's world.

It is clear that our lifestyle has an impact on the environment. What we do and how we do it make a crucial difference. This is why the first task of being the change is to become aware of what we do—benchmark how much water and energy we use and waste we generate. It is only then that we can transform our ways so that we can use as little and waste as little as possible—‘tread lightly on Earth’ has to be our motto.


Our Green Schools manual is about green practice. It takes the classroom into our lives. The joy is not just in the learning. The joy is in the experience of making change in our environment. We then live the change.

Take the issue of water. We know that while on the one hand water scarcity is growing—many do not even have clean drinking water—on the other hand available water is getting contaminated. The answer then is to do the following:

- a. Augment our water resources by capturing every drop of water where and when it falls—we can do rainwater harvesting so that every rooftop, every paved surface becomes a water catchment. We are then part of the solution.
- b. Minimize water demand—we can do this by making sure that we do not waste water and, in fact, come up with solutions to use recycled water and even ways to minimize what we use in our kitchens, bathrooms and gardens.
- c. Stop pollution. This is more difficult, but we can be part of the solution if we can find ways in our school or colony to intercept, treat and reuse sewage. Turn wastewater into water.

It is the same with garbage. If we measure our garbage we will know how much we generate. But if we deliberately separate out the wet waste—all the food peels, leaves and other biodegradables—from the plastic, glass, metal etc., we will know the composition of our waste. Once we know this, we can manage it—as the biodegradable can be composted or used to make energy, and the plastic, glass and metal can be recycled. But more importantly, we will know what we use that generates non-degradable garbage and then plan deliberately to cut out the high-waste items. We can do this.

If each school and each home becomes the laboratory of action, then the ripples will spread fast and furious. We will take these lessons of life to make them life itself.



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